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## EMPLOYMENT, WORKING CONDITIONS AND MODE OF LIVING:

### THE CASE OF THE NEPALI WATCHMEN IN BOMBAY<sup>1</sup>

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#### Introduction and Methodology

Nepali laborers in Bombay are engaged in various economic activities. They are employed in many different industries and occupations. Among these, the job of watchman employs quite a sizable number of Nepali laborers in Bombay.<sup>2</sup> By and large, the Nepali watchmen are employed to guard blocks of offices, banks, factories, commercial complexes, residential colonies, private buildings, and the like.

This paper attempts to highlight the employment, working and living conditions of the Nepali watchmen in the city of Bombay, with an emphasis on the relation of these issues to a few selected background factors. It was hypothesized that the employment, working and living conditions of these people improve in relation to their personal and employment backgrounds. The hypotheses related to these issues have been tested against primary quantitative survey data collected in the field in 1988.

A quota sample design and snowball sampling procedure were used to draw a sample of 58 watchmen from three sectors of employment, namely, public institutes, industrial and commercial enterprises, and housing cooperative societies. Data were collected by means of interview and observation techniques. The data were analyzed with the help of univariate and bivariate tables prepared on machines. While univariate tables were interpreted on the basis of percentage distribution, the trends in the bivariate tables were ascertained by using the chi-square ( $X^2$ ) test. The hypotheses were accepted or rejected by considering the value of chi-square ( $X^2$ ) at a 0.05 level of significance. However, the non-random sample design and small sample size have been admitted as the major limitations of the study.

### Background

Most of the Nepali watchmen in Bombay come from the hill areas of the Far Western Development Region (FWDR) of Nepal, particularly the Doti, Achham, Baitadi and Dadeldhura districts. The economy of the hills of the FWDR is mainly characterized by a scarcity of farm land, low agricultural productivity, little non-farm employment and short- and longterm labor migration (See CBS 1987; EIU 1981; EIU 1982; Dahal, Rai and Manzardo 1977).

On the average, the people of the FWDR are poor and indebted. In order to meet their household expenses and make payments on their loans, they have to look for work outside the area. Due to the lack road and transport linkages with the rest of Nepal, they have little exposure or contact with other parts of the country. The small size of the industrial sector and the scarce non-farm employment elsewhere in Nepal (CBS 1987:197), coupled with massive underemployment among the rural and agricultural labor force in the country, discourages workers from remaining in Nepal to work. Relatively more exposure to the Indian border and extensive road and transport facilities in India gives the Nepali laborers much easier access to the big towns and cities of India. Bombay, because it is highly industrialized and has many Nepali immigrants, particularly appeals to them.

Since the Nepali immigrants are rural, poor, and for the most part young, they come to Bombay with little or no education and no non-farm experience. Thus it is extremely difficult for them to get access to skilled or technical jobs in the city. On the other hand, their reputation as "the brave, sincere and honest Gurkhas" has made it easier for them to find jobs as watchmen, chowkidars and guards. These people are the most trusted and, therefore, most preferred candidates for such jobs. In the city of Bombay, the job of watchman has been stereotyped as that of 'the Gurkhas'. The term 'Gurkha' is usually applied to all watchmen, even if they are not Nepali. This stereotype suggests that the watchman job is easily accessible to Nepali people. Besides, the old workers make jobs more accessible to the latter through the chain of contacts between the old workers and new arrivals. They provide information about job opportunities, vacancies, etc., and make recommendations to prospective employers.

### Sector of Employment

In Bombay, Nepali laborers work as watchmen in the following sectors of employment: (1) public institutions, (2) manufacturing and commercial establishments, (3) housing cooperative societies, and (4) independent or private buildings and shops, in which case they are called 'street watchmen'.

The employment and working conditions of watchmen are different in each of these sectors of employment. Although the employment and working conditions in private institutes are strictly regulated by rules and regulations, these may not be practiced in the manufacturing and commercial establishments. In the housing cooperative societies, rules and regulations may not exist at all. The employment and working conditions of the 'street watchmen' employed to guard individual or private buildings and shops during the night are the least regulated legally (Sinha 1977:5).

The average duration of stay<sup>3</sup> of Nepali watchmen in Bombay is about ten years. Those who stay longer are generally older. At first they start work in housing societies. As time goes on, they shift from housing to private industries, and then to public institutes. Similarly, the young watchmen start in the housing sector, while the elder ones settle in the public institutes. The rationale behind this pattern is that the younger immigrants begin work in the less organized and regulated housing societies. More experienced and older workers accumulate market exposure, information, and contacts with natives, allowing them to join more organized and better regulated establishments.

Education plays an insignificant role in obtaining jobs. The watchmen do not significantly differ in their educational background, which is little. They do not receive formal education in their work, even in the public industries and institutes.

### Employment and Working Conditions

Initially, the only occupational experience of the Nepali watchmen in Bombay is that of owner cultivators or agricultural laborers. In Bombay, many have taken a variety of jobs in addition or prior to that of watchman. These include domestic servant, peon, factory worker, plumber, helper, cook, hotel boy, and milk boy in commercial and industrial enterprises. They leave their jobs one after another, mainly to return to Nepal for visits.

The reasons for the unsteady character of their work reveal two interrelated characteristics of employment conditions in the private sector. These are lack of job security and leave facilities on the part of the employers, and lack of commitment to particular jobs on the part of the watchmen. Due to the temporary, ad hoc nature of employment and working conditions, the Nepali workers seek employment for supplementary income for their households in Nepal, not as a career. Their attachment to their family in Nepal is still primary.

The average watchman has been working on the same job for the past seven months or so. He draws an average salary of Rs. 757 per month. Past job experience does not seem to improve present



salaries. This may also be a contributing factor in the frequent job changes, since there is no inducement to remain at the same job. The primary reason for changing jobs is to go to Nepal. When the laborers return from Nepal, they take whatever job is available, irrespective of the salary. Often, the salary of the next job is less than that of the previous one.

Watchmen in the public sector enjoy greater job security and benefits than those in the private sector. They work a fixed 8 hour workday, with weekly holidays and leave facilities. They are provided equipment such as truncheon and torch, rain coats or umbrellas, warm clothes, boots and uniforms appropriate to the hour and the season. They enjoy fringe benefits and facilities, such as increment, provident fund, medical facilities, and housing. The housing, unlike 'free accommodation', may be either consist of rent-free quarters or a housing allowance. Watchmen in the public sector usually do not work overtime, and, if they do, they are reimbursed with overtime pay equal to or greater than their regular rate of pay.

Employment and working conditions in the industrial sector vary from organization to organization. Watchmen working for manufacturing industries, especially those in the public sector, are permanent employees with a fixed 8 hour workday, weekly holidays, and leave facility. However, even those with an 8 hour workday usually work 12 hour days, seven days a week, in order to earn overtime pay which between one and two times the usual wage rate. The kinds of equipment supplied to the industrial employees include various combinations of truncheon, torch, umbrella or raincoat, warm clothes, boots and dress. The same goes for fringe benefits and facilities such as increments, provident funds, bonuses, and medical and housing facilities.

Commercial employees receive less benefits than industrial ones, especially in the private sector. They are generally employed temporarily with twelve hour working days. They may or may not receive weekly holidays and leave facilities.

Watchmen in housing cooperatives are also employed temporarily. They have twelve hour working days and seven day workweeks. They enjoy no holidays, leave facilities or fringe benefits other than increments to their monthly salary and housing facilities in the form of 'free accommodation'. Unlike rent-free quarters, the 'free accommodation' is informal and ad hoc. These workers do not work overtime, and, among the various categories of watchmen, they are the ones who most commonly take odd jobs in addition to their watchman job. In the mornings they usually clean the automobiles of the residents of the colony for which they work. For this they are paid Rs. 30 to 40 per car per month. They also do domestic work for the residents, usually for tips.

The employment and working conditions of the Nepali watchmen in Bombay are poor, especially in the housing cooperatives where the benefits and facilities are the least. Generally, working conditions<sup>4</sup> seem to be positively related to the sector of employment and the personal backgrounds of the watchmen. Public institutes provide the best working conditions, and after them the industrial sector, while housing societies provide the worst conditions. Aspects of the personal backgrounds that seem significant are age and present tenure of employment. Older watchmen and ones who have been working longer at the same job enjoy better working conditions than younger or more recently employed ones.

As Nepali immigrants grow older and work longer in Bombay, they tend to shift from the worst sectors to better ones. They initially work in the housing sector, then in private industry, and finally in the comparatively strictly regulated public institutes. Due to the better regulation and more permanent character of the jobs in the public institutes, the Nepali watchmen there tend to remain for longer periods. The longer duration of employment facilitates the further betterment of their conditions.

Education and previous job experience as elsewhere seem to be insignificant factors, either for obtaining jobs or bettering their working conditions. Generally, the people who are searching for watchmen jobs are not greatly differentiated by education anyway.

### Mode of Life

On the whole, the way of life of Nepali watchmen in Bombay is unsettled, disorganized, and ad hoc.

For housing, many watchmen live as frugally as possible in rent-free but inconvenient and informal shelters provided by the employers within the work places. These include small huts, rooms under stairs, hardware storerooms, water pump shades, and open sky garages. Shared by co-workers, including friends and relatives, these shelters are small, congested and overcrowded. Consequently, the watchmen in these quarters cannot think of bringing their immediate families to live with them. They cook in the shelters and sleep in the verandah or similar spaces in their work place, such as in a garage.

Some watchmen live in rent-free quarters within the work place. These are either *kuchha* or *pukka* houses (buildings). The *kuchha* houses are small and congested. The *pukka* ones seem to be the most convenient of all the housing types. These quarters, unlike the free accommodations, more or less satisfy minimum housing needs. The workers living in these are relatively organized, more settled and permanent. The watchmen in the *pukka* quarters are found with their families.

Some watchmen rent space outside their work place in tiny, congested huts, usually in the slum areas.

For food, the watchmen arrange tea and two frugal meals a day, lunch and dinner. Breakfast is uncommon. They share their food with the other people in their quarters, depending upon the type of arrangement.

The watchmen like to rest during their leisure time. This is not surprising, considering their long workweek. In addition to resting, they gossip, go to the cinema, play cards, visit friends and relatives, listen to the radio, and read books. Two characteristics may be noted about their leisure time. They do not spend money, except at the cinema, and their activities center on their co-workers or families. Only viewing the cinema can be described as a specifically urban characteristic.

In the manner of the watchmen's working conditions, their living conditions<sup>5</sup> seem to be positively related to their personal backgrounds, including age and tenure of stay, and the sector of employment. Older watchmen live relatively more settled lives in Bombay than the younger ones, and ones who have been there longer live better than those who have been there only a short time. Ones who work in public institutions are relatively more settled than those in industries, and those in cooperative societies are the least unsettled. Again, education does not seem to be a factor.

Again, the relationship between the two factors can be drawn. Those who live more settled lives have been in Bombay longer, and those who have lived and been employed in Bombay longer work in public institutions. In conclusion, the sector of employment determines the level of life. As the watchmen remain in Bombay longer, they shift from the housing sector to industry, and then to the well-regulated employment in the public institutions. A possible implication is that the watchmen cannot or do not stay a long time in Bombay on an ad hoc basis. Either they manage to settle themselves, or they leave the city for their homes in Nepal.

### Summary and Conclusion

The Nepali watchmen in Bombay are characterized by an unsettled, unorganized and ad hoc way of life in the city. Newcomers are generally employed in housing cooperatives and experience the worst conditions. As they grow older and spend more years in Bombay, they shift their employment to the industrial and public sectors, where their working conditions improve respectively. The sector of employment seems to be the most immediately determining factor in their conditions of employment and life in the city.

Education and previous job experience do not seem to be so important.

However, changes are taking place. Unlike a few years ago, it is much more difficult to find jobs in the well regulated employment sectors such as public institutions and industries. Provisions regarding age, educational background, occupational background and, in some cases, even nationality have been introduced. For example, the most preferred candidates for watchmen in banks or manufacturing are those with some education and military experience, especially army retirees.

The newly arriving younger Nepali immigrants are confined to either housing cooperative societies or industrial commercial establishments run by the private sector. This indicates that in the future, if not now, young immigrants with little or no education, and occupational backgrounds limited to owner-cultivation or agricultural labor as characterizes the vast majority of Nepali people, may have little access to the job of watchmen, except under the poorest and least regulated conditions, dooming them to pauperism.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>This paper is based on fieldwork carried out in 1988 for the project report submitted to the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Bombay for a Postgraduate Certificate in Research Methodology.

<sup>2</sup>There are no data available regarding the exact numbers of the Nepali laborers working as watchmen in Bombay.

<sup>3</sup>The duration of the stay in Bombay does not necessarily mean a continuous one. The overall period is a more or less net stay in Bombay in the sense that it does not include any stay in Nepal for one year or more from the first migration to Bombay.

<sup>4</sup>Working conditions as a variable represent a composite quantification of employment, working hours, holidays, leave facility, protective equipment, and fringe benefits and facilities in terms of their operational measures. The overall index or score of working conditions was divided into a trichotomy of low, moderate and high, mainly for the purpose of comparison.

<sup>5</sup>Living conditions as a variable were quantified and taken compositely in the form of housing conditions (types of house, house status and staying arrangement), food arrangement, and leisure time activities in terms of their operational measures. The overall index or score of living conditions was divided into a trichotomy of low, moderate and high, mainly for the purpose of comparison.

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## TELEVISION AND THE CHILD IN NEPAL:

### AN ASSESSMENT OF VIEWING PATTERNS

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Television was initially introduced into Nepal from the fourth of Fagun, 1041 B.S. on a trial basis. Regular transmission commenced from the 14th of Paush, 2042 B.S. Now, with the transmission of morning programs, in addition to the evening ones, from its studio in Singha Durbar, Nepal Television (NTV) broadcasts four and a half hours a day.

The establishment of the Biratnagar television center allows television programs to reach a much larger audience, especially in the Central and Tarai region.

The morning transmission in Kathmandu starts with a religious program consisting of devotional songs (Bhajan) and discourses on Hinduism and Buddhism (Pravachan). This is followed by news headlines. Then after a light variety program, the morning program concludes with a bulletin of news in Nepali.<sup>1</sup>

In the evening transmission, the regular programming includes an educational program for children, news bulletins in Nepali and English, and the current affairs program "Aath Baje" (Eight O'clock). Besides these, there are entertainment programs, including telefilms, dramas and serials, and weekly programs on current international events called "Viswa Ghatna."

Among all of the programs, the ones with the highest rate of viewing among children are the children's educational program "Srijana Ko Adha Ghanta," the English serial "The A-Team," and, more recently, the serial epic "Ramayana."

An average child from a middle class family<sup>2</sup> in Kathmandu watches about an hour of television daily. He or she may view continuously or in two or three phases of about a half hour each — the average length of a program.

This study focuses on the middle class child for the following reasons. Children from upper class families can be expected to be exposed to both television and video, with a usual preference for the